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# SYMPATHETIC MAGIC AND WITCHCRAFT AMONG THE BELLACOOLA

By HARLAN I. SMITH

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MANY OF the Bellacoola Indians today believe in sympathetic magic and witchcraft, after over a hundred years of contact with white men. Most of them live within hearing of the bells of the mission church, and the government school. Not a few of the men take logging contracts; some of them build and operate motor boats; many of them join the fishing fleets of the salmon canneries; most of the women work in the canneries, and all deal at the white men's stores.

The Bellacoola lived on the heads of the long inlets half way up the Pacific Coast of Canada and in the tributary Bella Coola valley. Now, numbering perhaps two hundred and fifty, they, with the exception of a few families, are concentrated on one reservation at the mouth of the Bella Coola river. The Bella Coola valley has been called the Norway of Canada. This was where Sir Alexander Mackenzie, the first white man to cross Canada overland, reached the sea.

Aboriginally, the Bellacoola were of the North Pacific Coast culture of Swanton, which is characterized by the extensive use of red cedar and its products, particularly salmon, the making of graceful, sea-going canoes, each hewn from a single cedar, the erection of large rectangular houses made of cedar planks, with carved house posts and totem poles, lack of pottery, and superiority in carpenter work, carving, and painting. This culture belongs to the haiatlzuk area, but the Bellacoolas were nevertheless to a certain extent. The art of the area was their best known from the paintings and carvings of the totem poles, largely of conventionalized animal forms. The life centred around a very highly developed social organization, an extensive and powerful financial system, and property rights in names, rituals and houses. The Bellacoola language is one of the Salish linguistic stock. They

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are apparently more recent comers to the coast than their neighbors and have not fully adopted the coast culture.

The following examples of syncretistic magic and witchcraft, collected during 1920 to 1923 among the Bellacoola, illustrate the extent of their belief in this direction. 114 121

Most of the information was given me by the late Captain Schooner, born about 1850, and Joshua Woodly, born about 1845, both apparently full-blood Bellacoola Indians. Neither of them spoke English and both gave me the data in Chinook jargon, which I have endeavored to interpret and arrange in logical order, but have tried to render it as nearly as possible the Indian mode of thought, feeling and expression. Schooner was a pagan priest-seer. Joshua has great knowledge of plants and animals, and is a Bellacoola scientist, but his great ambition and jealousy, combined with his disloyalty in giving up his own people's customs and adopting a very thin veneer of Christianity, color his statements relating to beliefs, although his plant and animal data have always withstood cross examination and comparison with the data supplied by other Indians. Alec Davis and Mrs. Wilson Black told of the road. They do not talk English and spoke to me in Chinook jargon. Only the accounts about the grizzly bear skin and the knowledge of heaven skin, which were given me by Pus Stanislaus, were told in English. 15 [141] [191]

The material was not given as accounts of magic or witchcraft, but rather as part of the data regarding the properties of plants and animals of which I was endeavoring to collect as complete information as possible. 114 121

Joshua, who is even younger than Captain Schooner, remembers the time when Mr. John Clayton was the only white man living in the Bella Coola valley, and when they saw only one other white man every year or two. Consequently these men remember the old Bellacoola beliefs before they were much, if at all, affected by European ideas. 114 115

It will be noticed that magic among the Bellacoola is universal or was both for beneficial and injurious purposes, and that the materials giving effect to it are of both plant and animal origin. 787 794

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The beneficial purposes include: making a child grow up to be a good dancer, industrious, a swift berry picker, or a strong man; curing lung trouble; making the river erode where wanted; and two ways of stopping rain. The injurious purposes include: two ways of making a person grow up to be a thief; the causing of craziness and quarrelsomeness and the three ways of causing death.

The materials and actions used include: ashes of aspen leaves; a dead toad, used with hair, with a red cedar bark face wiper, and with lost pieces of thimble berry shoots which were accidentally dropped while being eaten; ashes of a yellow jacket's nest; a living raven with phlegm; beaver paws, in two instances; a skin bracelet from a beaver's foreleg; a dead wood-rat; a dead mouse; a grizzly bear's skin; a living rat squirrel with a bit of aspen fringe; setting fire to a wood-rat's house; and poking an ant hill.

To make a person a good dancer the ashes of the burned leaves of the aspen or trembling poplar were said to be useful, but Jenkins said this may have been a joke. The Bellacoola Indians say the leaves dance. They never say that they tremble. When a baby was born, if the parents talked about it and the father desired that the baby grow up to be a good dancer, the mother or father got the leaves, burned them and put the ashes on the baby's hands, knees and elbows. When telling of this Jenkins held his hands with the finger tips up and moved them as the Bellacoola do in dancing. Both rich and poor were danced.

A baby girl would grow up to be industrious, it was believed, if the warm limbs of a recently dead beaver were applied to her. The Bellacoola apparently observed the great industry of the beaver.

To make a baby girl grow up to be a fast berry-picking woman, the ring of skin from between two cuts around a beaver's foreleg was put on her wrist and was left on until it wore off.

To make a boy grow up to be a strong man, a skin of the [illegible]

For phlegm on the lungs, more permanent than a simple cold, the patient expectorated in something and some one secretly mixed the fresh phlegm with salmon eggs and put the mixture

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out for the ravens to eat. This was done four times, and if a raven ate it, the patient recovered, according to Captain Schooner's belief. As the call of the raven sounds somewhat like a person affected with phlegm in the throat, this may be a case of sympathetic magic, at any rate it is one of witchcraft.

To make the diver srnake at a certain place in order to hook a big jaw, a beaver's foot was buried in each of several spots in the place.

A continuous rain would come, and the sun would come out, it was said, if the people set fire to a wood-rat's house.

When it rained too much the Bellacoola Indians poked down an ant hill and said, "Give us warm sunshine." They believed this would bring results, but now that Joshua is a Christian he says he does not believe it and says it is useless play talk.

Bad boys or girls, but not adults, would take a dead mouse, warm it over a fire, and rub the warmed mouse on the hands of a baby. This made the baby steal when it grew up. The so-called stealing habits of the mouse were supposed to be transferred to the child.

The still warm body of a freshly killed wood-rat was used in the same way to make a baby, boy or girl, "crazy," and grow up to be a constant thief. The notorious habits of the wood-rat, as well as those of the mouse, were evidently well recognized by the Bellacoola.

To make people crazy, the red squirrel had to be properly used by a shaman and then it possessed strong power. One woman who had been made crazy in this way died in 1897. She did not like the shaman and he did not like her. He stole her spirit. She was crazy. He took it into the forest and performed witchcraft because he wanted to spoil her life by making her crazy. He caught a red squirrel alive, possibly in a little basket. He had a box called a "bad box," in which he kept his things of evil power. He put some of the things of her spirit around the red squirrel and let it run her crazy. The woman then became crazy and sometimes fell down, but part of the time she seemed well. My Indian informant, Joshua, had seen her. This example of sympathetic

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magic probably originated from observing the many very erotic and apparently purposeless movements of the red squirrel.

When one wished to cause the child of one's enemy to grow up to be a quarrelsome person, a yellow jacket's nest was burned and the ashes were rubbed on the face, hands, and arms of the child. When the child grew up, it was believed, he or she would fight with everyone. The yellow jacket's natural defense of it's nest is interpreted as quarrelsome, even by white people.

The toad was a powerful medicine for the bad bee used in witchcraft.

To make a man or woman die of cruelness, one of the hairs of the person's head was put in the body cavity of a disemboweled toad.

To make a person's face swell and squirm until death came, the little pieces of softened red calico back used to clean the person's face were put in the body cavity of a disemboweled toad. The idea underlying this was probably the reproduction of the warts of the toad on the face of the person.

To make a person die, a piece of the young shoot of a thistle berry, lost by that person while eating, was put in the mouth of a toad. Death was supposed to take place in half an hour.

One very old man, Judas by name, boasts of having killed seven people by means of his bad bee used in witchcraft, especially of having caused the death of Mr. John Clayton, who was the first white man to remain long in this area, having kept the Hudson's Bay store at Bella Coola, and later a store of his own, but who died far away from Bella Coola in 1909.

Mrs. Samuel King who died in 1923 was said to have been poisoned by Willie Mack. Her father, Captain Schooner, was said to have stated that Willie would die in July on the anniversary of her death. Willie Mack died in the summer of 1923. Captain Schooner died a few days later. He was said to understand malevolent witchcraft thoroughly. It was said that people often cut off the calves of Willie Mack's shins. Willie Mack's father was too great a chief so that people were ashamed, and consequently killed Willie by means of witchcraft with something in a bad bee.

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Charlie West, a Carrier Indian from Ulkatcho, believed that Mrs. Samuel King had been killed by Willie Mack's witchcraft. Alexander Chimmes, a Bellacoola Indian, believed that Willie Mack had been killed by Captain Schooner's witchcraft in revenge for his daughter's death, and that Captain Schooner died of witchcraft on the part of Willie Mack. 75V

That Sir Alexander Mackenzie, the first white man to visit the Bellacoola, performed acts of witchcraft on the beach, was strongly asserted by Indians, who would not believe me that Mackenzie was probably taking observations, determining his geographical position.

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Victoria.